

## DISCERNMENT FOR AUTHORIZED MINISTRY



Committee on Authorized Ministry, Central Association  
Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ  
6 Institute Road, Box #5  
Worcester, MA 01609

### POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

- I. The Discernment Process
- II. The Ordination Process
- III. The Ecclesiastical Council
- IV. Approval of Call

## I. The Discernment Process

The following document summarizes the policies and expectations of the Central Association Committee on Authorized Ministry for discerning a call to authorized ministry. While the process has been traditionally referred to as “in care,” the Committee in accordance with current trends both within the Central Association and Parish Life and Leadership of the United Church of Christ now emphasizes the *discernment* of Christ’s will. This document should be read in conjunction with the *Manual on Ministry (Section 2 of 10), Student In Care of Association*. Candidates and Advisors should read the entire document at the beginning of the discernment process.

Candidates are responsible for all aspects of the discernment process—including submitting paper-work to the administrative assistant for the association at least thirty (30) days in advance of all meetings and proactively engaging in all expectations.

Ordinarily, a candidate may not apply to begin the discernment process unless she or he has been an active member of a United Church of Christ congregation for at least two (2) years. Once accepted, the discernment process generally lasts a minimum of two (2) years.

A background check **MUST** be completed thru Oxford Document Management Company, Inc. before any appointment is scheduled. **Please contact the Central Association before completing this requirement.** The cost for the background check is currently \$160.00; this is paid to Oxford Document Management Company before the application is completed.

### **Application**

The local church lifts the candidate up for consideration. The application consists of the following documents and should be sent by regular mail or via email(preferred method) in a pdf format:

1. Candidate’s letter of request. (Form A)
2. Initial Letter of support from the local church. (Form B) (Usually from the Deacons)
3. Certification of local church membership. (Form C)
4. Three (3) letters of reference, one of which is from the pastor of that local church. (Form D)
5. Official transcripts from any completed undergraduate and graduate studies (unofficial transcripts are acceptable for current studies).
6. A paper written by the candidate. This paper should not exceed 10 pages.  
“Describe the Christian pilgrimage that brings you to this time and place; include some biographical information for the committee to begin to learn who you are. How do you understand your own calling to, with and on behalf of the UCC?”
7. Any candidates having been in a discernment process in another association or denomination should have that adjudicatory send a complete copy of the file directly to the Committee on Authorized Ministry (Central Association office).
8. Candidate Release Form. (Form F)
9. Completion of Background Check

10. A current photo of the candidate

### **Initial Interview**

*From the Manual on Ministry: “The Association Committee on Authorized Ministry interviews the candidate to determine the candidate’s (a) fitness, (b) aptitudes, (c) Christian experience, and (d) commitment as a basis for preparing for [authorized ministry]” (page 15, 2 of 10 Student In Care of Association).*

Generally, candidates meet with the full Committee on Authorized Ministry at 10:00 AM or 11:00 AM for 45 minutes. The Committee meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month at:

Central Association, MACUCC  
6 Institute Road  
Worcester, MA 01609

The candidate should bring at least two guests, preferably their local church pastor and another representative from the local church. Guests will be invited to speak, briefly, in support of the candidate.

### **The Decision**

The Committee will be guided by three documents in making its decisions.

1. “The Church’s Expectations of its Applicants for Student In Care” (page 18, *Manual on the Ministry (Section 2 of 10), Student In Care of Association*).
2. “Signs of Growth and Maturity.”
3. “A Committee on Ministry Developmental Assessment Tool: Based on the Marks of Readiness for Ordination.”

### **Advisors**

If the candidate is accepted, the Committee assigns a Discernment Advisor(s).

The Discernment Advisor is a member of the Committee on Authorized Ministry and advises the candidate about the discernment process. The advisor offers practical and pastoral advice to encourage the candidate’s growth. This advisor need not be ordained.

It is the responsibility of the candidate to develop the advisor-candidate relationship, checking in, initiating meetings, ensuring that reports are submitted in a timely manner, *et cetera*.

## **Guidelines**

The candidate and Discernment Advisor should meet at least twice a year in order to facilitate a relationship of trust and support. The following are suggested ways to cultivate the advisor-candidate relationship.

- Review and discuss the policies and expectations of the Discernment Process
- Reflect on the candidate's work in the local church or field site; perhaps the Advisor can observe the candidate or watch a video of a sermon
- Encourage and provide experiences whereby the candidate can grow in areas that need strengthening
- Review and discuss the following
  1. The United Church of Christ Statement of Faith
  2. Ordained Minister's Code
  3. Ordination Vows
  4. The Central Association Boundary Training
- Review and discuss the following reports
  1. Field Education Final Evaluation(s)
  2. Clinical Pastoral Education Final Evaluation
  3. Candidacy Review II
- Read, critique and suggest improvements on the candidate's Ordination Paper prior to its final draft and circulation.
- Potentially, serve as the Ordination Advisor, offering advice and assistance in planning the Service of Ordination.
- Review and discuss letters of call and compensation package during the search and call process.

## **Psychological Evaluation**

Candidates are expected to complete the Psychological Evaluation **within the first year of their discernment**. The association, the local church and the candidate each pay 1/3 of the cost.

Candidates should contact:

Center for Career Development & Ministry  
121 Manchester Street  
Nashua, NH 03064  
603-943-7611  
[info@ccdmin.org](mailto:info@ccdmin.org)

Candidates should release the final written report to the candidate's Discernment Advisor and:

Central Association, MACUCC  
c/o Debra Holmes  
6 Institute Road, Box #5  
Worcester, MA 01609

Candidates should be aware that when signing the Candidate Release (Form F) they agree to release all findings of the psychological evaluation to the members of the Committee on Authorized Ministry. Candidates can be assured that if any copies are made of the written report will be shredded or otherwise properly destroyed.

## **Boundary Awareness Training**

Candidates are required to complete a boundary awareness training approved by the Committee on Authorized Ministry during their discernment process. To find out when the Massachusetts Conference offers its training, candidates should contact:

Central Association, MACUCC  
6 Institute Road, Box #5  
Worcester, MA 01609  
508-963-8106  
[holmesd@macucc.org](mailto:holmesd@macucc.org)

## **Wider Church Participation**

While there are no formal requirements, candidates are strongly encouraged to participate in wider church activities, i.e. Association, Conference and Synod events.

## **Coursework**

As stated in the *Manual on Ministry*, candidates should make every effort to have a broad-based theological education. For more information see page 28-29 of *Section 3 of 10, Ordained Ministry*.

*UCC Polity Course.* Offered by an accredited theological school or the denomination. Candidates should make every effort to fulfill this requirement early in the discernment process.

*Candidacy Review II.* Candidates should, when possible, invite their Discernment Advisor to the review of the theological school. Final reports should be submitted to the Committee for review.

## **Field Education**

Candidates are required to complete at least two years of supervised ministry with an accredited UCC field education supervisor. At least one of these placements must be in a local church setting of the United Church of Christ.

Final evaluations should be submitted to the association office to be kept in their ministerial folder.

While one of the ways a candidate in discernment prepares for pastoral ministry is by engaging in it, the expectation is that it will happen in a supervised setting. Therefore, a candidate may not take a position with church that involves unsupervised pastoral ministry without the prior approval of the Committee on Authorized Ministry.

## **Clinical Pastoral Education**

The Central Association requires at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). CPE does not qualify as one of the two years of required field education.

## **Biblical Content Exam (only for people entering the process after September 1, 2017)**

Any person entering the process for ordination for Word and Sacrament after September 1, 2017 must take and pass the Biblical Content Exam as administered by the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA). This exam is offered online twice a year (September and February) and may be taken multiple times. The pass score is 70 points. Members in discernment may take the exams at any time after they begin the process (that is: meet with the COM for the first time). It must be passed before meeting with the Committee on Authorized Ministry for their final ordination interview. Information on the exam can be found here: <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/prep4min/bible-content-exam/>.

## **First Annual Review**

Candidates meet with members of the Committee annually for renewal. Candidates should consult with their Discernment Advisor and the association administrative assistant to schedule a renewal date. No later than thirty (30) days prior to the annual review, candidates should submit the following written material:

1. Report from Discernment Advisor (Form G)
2. Report from a local church committee or local church pastor (Form D)
3. Update on where the candidate is presently in the process (Form H)
4. If still in school, a transcript
5. A sermon the candidate has preached
6. The candidate will lead the members of the Committee on Authorized Ministry in morning worship. The service is not be longer than 20 minutes and must include a sermon and prayer.

## **Second Annual Review**

Again, candidates will meet with members of the Committee annually for renewal. Candidates should consult with their Discernment Advisor and the association administrative assistant to schedule a renewal date. No later than thirty (30) days prior to the annual review, candidates should submit the following written material:

1. Report from Discernment Advisor (Form G)
2. Report from a local church committee or local church pastor (Form D)
3. A brief (1-2 page) update on where the candidate is presently in the process (Form H)
4. If still in school, a transcript
5. A sermon the candidate has preached
6. The completed paper assignment.  
    “Write a paper that demonstrates your understanding of and thoughts on the Ordained Minister’s Code. For instance, ‘How does one truly minister impartially?’”

These requirements still apply if the second annual renewal is also the candidate’s Ordination Interview.

### **Third and Subsequent Annual Reviews**

Again, candidates meet with the full Committee annually for renewal. Candidates should consult with their Discernment Advisor and the association administrative assistant to schedule a renewal date. No later than thirty (30) prior to the annual review, candidates should submit the following written material:

1. Report from Discernment Advisor (Form G)
2. Report from a local church committee or local church pastor (Form D)
3. A brief (1-2 page) update on where the candidate is presently in the process (Form H)
4. If still in school, an official transcript
5. A sermon the candidate has preached
6. The completed paper assignment  
    “Write a paper that describes your own self-awareness of strengths and areas for growth in ministry. How are you better and feeling more comfortable as a pastor and person of faith having been part of this process?”

These requirements still apply if this annual renewal is also the candidate’s Ordination Interview except that the ordination paper replaces the paper assignment described in requirement #6. Candidates are advised to review their paper with their advisor before submitting it to the committee.

### **Non-Transferability**

Being in discernment is a relationship, not an accomplishment. It is not something that can be transferred from one association to another (*Manual; 2 of 10 Student In Care of Association*, 11).

## II. The Ordination Process

The following document summarizes the policies and expectations of the Central Association Committee on Authorized Ministry for pursuing ordination in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, having successfully completed the discernment process. This document should be read in conjunction with the *Manual on Ministry (Section 3 of 10), Ordained Ministry*.

### **The Ordination Paper**

The candidate should write a paper demonstrating their theological and pastoral expertise. The paper should be no more than 20 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins.

The ordination paper should be written in conversation with the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith. The paper should demonstrate a candidate's ability to articulate the historic Christian faith and locate their own faith in relation to the ecumenical and Reformed tradition.

### **The Ordination Interview**

If a candidate has completed all the requirements of the discernment process, she or he may schedule an ordination interview, with the approval of the Committee, within 6 months of graduation from Seminary or Divinity School.

At the ordination interview the candidate will defend their ordination paper.

### **The Decision**

Once a candidate has successfully passed the Ordination Interview, she or he may begin circulating a profile.

“The Committee’s task in the examination is to satisfy itself that the candidate is prepared for and can faithfully and effectively carry out the responsibilities of ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.” (page 7, *Manual on Ministry (Section 3 of 10), Ordained Ministry*)

The Committee will be guided by three documents in making its decisions.

1. “The Church’s Expectations of its Candidates for Ordination” (page 28-29, *Manual on the Ministry (Section 3 of 10), Ordained Ministry*).
2. “Signs of Growth and Maturity.” (A copy of this resource can be made available.)
3. “A Committee on Ministry Developmental Assessment Tool: Based on the Marks of Readiness for Ordination.” (A copy of this tool can be made available.)

#### IV. Approval of Call

The search and call process is lengthy and sometimes demanding. It requires patience and perseverance. Candidates are permitted to circulate their profile by an affirmative vote of the Committee on Authorized Ministry at their ordination interview. A candidate may not interview for a position until after the Ecclesiastical Council.

#### **Annual Renewals**

The candidate remains in the discernment process until a first call has been approved by the Central Association Committee on Authorized Ministry and the candidate has been ordained. Though there are no required actions, candidates are expected to remain in covenant with the Association.

If one year following the Ecclesiastical Council the candidate has not yet been ordained, the Committee invites him or her to meet with the committee for a support consultation. This renewal maintains the relationship established during the discernment process.

#### **Final Meeting with the Committee on Authorized Ministry**

When a candidate receives an offer from a calling body, she or he should discuss the position with the Discernment Advisor. Together candidate and advisor should review and discuss the job description—does this position meet the skills and calling of the candidate? —and letter of call—is the compensation package within Conference Guidelines?

When the candidate has been voted on and called to the position, a meeting will be scheduled with the Committee on Authorized Ministry. In advance of this meeting, the candidate should provide Committee Members with the job description and the call letter. The candidate should bring to the meeting representatives of both the local church and the calling body. The local church should also come prepared with at least three possible dates, no fewer than 30 days from the meeting, on which to schedule the service of ordination.

When a call is affirmed and approved by the Committee on Authorized Ministry, the date of ordination will be set by the Committee on Authorized Ministry and communicated to the Board of Directors and the Central Association Administrative Assistant. A letter missive will be sent by the association office 30 days in advance of the ordination date.

An Ordination Advisor will be assigned; in all likelihood, the Discernment Advisor and a member of the Board of Directors will serve in this capacity.

### III. The Ecclesiastical Council

An Ecclesiastical Council is an act of the Association, where the gathered delegates meet to determine a candidate's fitness for ordained ministry, in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Ecclesiastical Council's in the Central Association are convened and led by the Board of Directors. They take place in the candidate's local church. Candidates are encouraged to personally invite pastors and delegates to assure a healthy attendance at the Ecclesiastical Council.

Discernment Advisors will offer support and assistance to candidates through the Ecclesiastical Council. However, all information about scheduling, the agenda and expectations for the Ecclesiastical Council comes from the Association Board of Directors, not the Committee on Authorized Ministry.

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Once an Ordination date has been approved, an Ordination Advisor(s) from the Board of Directors (your Discernment Advisor may also act as Ordination Advisor) will be assigned to work with you. A template for the service will be given to you to help in planning the Ordination service. The bulletin needs to be reviewed by your Ordination Advisors and the Administrative Assistant for the association before it is printed.